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Sent on behalf of the Tongass Advisory Committee

Contacts: Les Cronk (lesc@sousteve.com) and Lynn Jungwirth (lynnj@hayfork.net)

Tongass Advisory Committee Expresses Support for Proposed Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan

KETCHIKAN, Alaska – During its final meeting, held December 1-3 in Ketchikan, the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) finalized its recommendations to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on developing an ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable forest management strategy for the Tongass National Forest. The Committee reached consensus on draft recommendations in May 2015; during this week's meeting, the group finalized its recommendations with very minor substantive changes. They unanimously support the preferred alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and recommend it be the foundation of the final amended Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan.

The Committee recognized the amount of work that the Tongass Interdisciplinary Team put into incorporating its recommendations into the Proposed Plan and DEIS, and believe that, for the most part, its recommendations were accurately reflected in the preferred alternative. Designated Federal Official, Jason Anderson, expressed mutual gratitude to the TAC's efforts, "I truly thank you. Very few of you received a paycheck to be here, and you gave your time and energy, over and over again, selflessly." Committee co-chair, Les Cronk, agreed, "The energy and focus of this group and the shared intent of achieving success has been inspirational. We all had a commitment to success and we achieved it!"

During the meeting, members of the Tongass Interdisciplinary Team provided an overview of how the TAC's recommendations were incorporated into the Proposed Land and Resource Management Plan, and offered the opportunity for an in-depth question and answer session to further the Committee's understanding of how its recommendations are reflected in the Proposed Plan. Following detailed discussion of the DEIS, the TAC provided comments for the Forest Service to consider in finalizing the Proposed Plan.

In addition to recommendations regarding the Proposed Plan, the TAC also provided advice regarding implementation and monitoring of the Tongass transition. Committee members stressed the value of place-based monitoring and social learning at the project-level throughout implementation of the new Plan, once finalized, to affect change through adaptation and clearly demonstrate local benefits of projects. The TAC discussed how the Forest should use these additional recommendations, which are not reflected in the Plan Amendment. They drafted a letter to Secretary Vilsack emphasizing the importance of accepting their recommendations as a

package, rather than a menu of options. They also intend to follow-up with the Regional Forest Service leadership in the near-term.

The Committee appreciates the input received through public comments, given at this meeting and throughout the entire process. Many comments at this meeting were in support of implementing the TAC recommendations, and offered suggestions for a successful transition.

Co-chair Cronk emphasized the ongoing value of the TAC's work, beyond their recommendations alone: "The TAC is a great example of what can be done – success is possible, even with a diverse group." The members are committed to continuing to work together through a collaborative process with the Forest and other interested stakeholders to ensure an effective transition. Co-chair Lynn Jungwirth expressed similar support and optimism for future collaboration on the Tongass: "Your willingness to accept each other's value sets is breathtaking, and I am continually impressed by the group's ability to come to solutions that integrate those value sets. You are most advanced collaborative group I have ever worked with. I have seen such youthful energy on the Tongass – I hope to see that energy in future collaborative efforts as the Tongass implements its transition strategy."

For more information about the Tongass Advisory Committee, visit <http://www.merid.org/tongassadvisorycommittee>. A final copy of the Committee's recommendations and comments to the Forest Service will be available there soon.